

## **Open Hands Devo**

### DEVO 1: Open Hands, Humble Heart

When you worship what is your posture of choice? Hands raised, eyes closed, head bowed? As a worship leader, I have seen about every expression of worship you could imagine from worshipers kneeling in reverence to God in pristine chapels to teenagers at youth rallies, dancing with the joy and abandon of King David. I believe God delights in the diversity of expression of praise, but the scriptures tell us there is something of greater concern to this Triune God we worship: the posture of our hearts.

In Psalm 51, one of David's most vulnerable and penitent prayers, he asserts that the Lord does not delight in sacrifice, and that he is not pleased with burnt offerings. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit", David says, "a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Ps 51:16, 17). At first glance, this may sound a bit confusing. Is God rejecting the very sacrifices he prescribed Israel to make to Him? Yet it isn't their worship he is rejecting; it is their *empty* worship. Even for us today, it's not our songs he desires, or our perfect church attendance, or even our tithe dollars; he wants our hearts! If our outward expression of worship is not the manifestation of an inner spiritual renewal, our sweetest songs and prayers are but noise to his ears. A heart engaged in worship is one that acknowledges their need for the saving grace of Jesus and hungers to be conformed to His likeness! May our open hands serve as an outward sign of a heart surrendered.

How has God been working in your heart recently, to bring about spiritual renewal? Have you experienced deeper awareness and presence of God in your personal and corporate worship? If not, what is one area of your life you need to release to the Father that will allow him to renew your heart?

### DEVO 2: "Let it go!"

I have a confession to make: Our whole family has succumbed to the "Frozen" craze. This hit Disney movie's theme song has taken the world by storm, and can be heard most nights sung in our home by my four year old daughter Josie, while wearing her

Elsa night gown and trying desperately to get her thin little hair to stay into her “Elsa braid”. As inspirational of a song as it is, the one problem I have with it is this: Let it go... to whom? There are days I would love to just “let go” of my problems, my responsibilities, my electric bill, and a thousand other things, but is that really the answer to my stress and anxiety?

In 1 Peter 5, we find this apostle writing a letter to a very scared little church, shaken yet impassioned to bear witness to what they had seen and heard. These were his words of affirmation: “Humble yourself, therefore, under the mighty hand of God”, Peter writes, “...casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you” (1 Pet 5:6, 7). What Peter is urging his readers and ourselves toward is not simply the letting go of our worries and troubles into thin air, but releasing them, even throwing them, into the very capable hands of our loving Father. If we believe him to be Creator of the Universe, how much more should we trust him to hold together every aspect of my life and yours? May this be the greater anthem of my life: the letting go of anxiety, that I may gain the peace that only comes from Jesus.

Are you bearing burdens and anxieties that God will take from you, if you will take them to Him? Make a list of the burdens and anxieties you are being overwhelmed with and then take each one of them to the Father and as you do say, “because you care for me, I am bringing this burden to you and I am leaving it with you.”

### DEVO 3: The Hand of Mercy

My hands are busy. I am married to my high school sweetheart Martin and our home stays in a constant state of chaos as we try to raise our four-year-old daughter and twin two-year-old boys! In addition to that, I write songs, serve at my local church and travel all over the nation for events each year, almost always with our three kids in tow! I love my life, but I am very busy.

There is a story in Luke chapter 10 of two very busy ministers. You may have heard it called the story of the Good Samaritan, which would have been quite the oxymoron in their day. The Samaritan, the despised half-breed Jew, stopped to help this beaten and dying Hebrew, took time to bind up his wounds, spent money to put

him up at an inn till he recovered. The message here is as plain and compelling to the original hearers as it is to you and me today. Am I too busy to show mercy? Are my hands too full of my own good works, my own agenda, my religious activity, to see those hurting around me? Lord, open my eyes to the greater call to extend mercy, to live in light of the mercy you have so richly shown to me.

Can you think of two areas within your circle of life where there is an opportunity to be a good Samaritan? Take a step in the direction of mercy and see what God might do in and through your life.

#### DEVO 4: Reaching out to Jesus

The streets were crowded that day as Jesus made his way through the city of Capernaum. She was sick and she was poor. Her bleeding condition held her captive for twelve years, spending all her money yet never finding a cure. She was an outcast, lonely and with literally no hope apart from a miracle. Maybe that's what gave her the boldness to push through the crowd that day, to attempt something so audacious: this untouchable bleeding woman reached out to touch the holy Son of God. And one touch was all it took. She was healed. "Daughter, your faith has made you well" (Mark 5:34).

What barriers hinder us from reaching out to Jesus? Do we, like this woman, feel unworthy, unloveable, an outcast, marginalized by society, ostracized by community? Maybe our issues seem too hideous, too egregious or too chronic to share with anyone. Maybe we've tried everything else and in our deep pit of disappointment, we can't muster up the hope to try just one more thing. Whatever your need today, Jesus already knows it. He already knows *you* and you are not just a face in the crowd. For any child who reaches out to him, he draws them close, embracing our shame and healing our brokenness.

Barriers such as broken relationships and unresolved or unconfessed sin can strain or even break our fellowship with the Father. Are there areas of your life that are broken? Take those to the Lord, he knows, he is waiting.

### DEVO 5: Letting go of Bitterness

Miriam Webster defines bitterness as “caused by or expressive of severe pain, grief, or regret”; with a definition like that, who can’t relate? Maybe it is the unexpected death of a loved one. Maybe it is the wrongful loss of a job, or the long road of unemployment you currently walk. No matter what loss or death of dream we face, bitterness is always a temptation; yet the scriptures tell us there is another path to take.

In Psalm 34, we find a man who is no stranger to heartache. David made his share of mistakes, and had many things happen to him that weren’t his fault, yet his response to both is the same: “I will bless the Lord at all times” (Ps 34:1). Rather than choosing to clench his fist in bitterness and turn from God, he opens his hand in praise to the very God who formed him and will continue to guide his every step. David makes the decision to not allow emotions or circumstances to rule in his life: He chooses to bless God. How might I choose blessing over bitterness in my own story? How might I choose to lift my hand in praise rather than shaking my fist over things I can’t change? May our praises be more than mere adoration but an act of faith and obedience, trusting the God is faithful, no matter how I feel.

Have you fallen into the trap of allowing bitterness to take root in your heart? Put a name on that bitterness and give it to God. Ask God to give you blessings in place of the bitterness.

### DEVO 6: Embracing the gospel message

If you had just one last moment to share something with your family and friends, what would it be? I know this may sound like a morbid exercise, but think for a moment: if I only had one last opportunity to share something with my kids, one last breath to instill a value in them, what would I say? This is the frame of mind we must adopt when approaching Matthew 28: 19 and 20. Its not just the very last verse of the book, but some of Jesus’ last words to his disciples, and to us, on this earth. “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me”, Jesus says. “Go,

therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age”.

Three key points to Jesus’ message jump out at me. First, he confirms the answer to the question the whole region had been asking since his first miracle: Are you really the Son of God? Jesus now claims the authority of God the Father, having defeated death and risen from the grave! He truly is the Son of God! Second, we hear his charge to us: Go! Take the truth we know and share it; and not just with those who look like us and sound like us, but to all the nations! What started in Jerusalem was never meant to stay there. Salvation came *from* the Jews, *for* the whole world! Last, sensing the fear in their hearts upon hearing so great a task, he reminds them, and us, of the promise of his presence. He does not send us on a mission simply on his behalf, but he comes alongside us every step of the way. As his children, there will never be a moment in which he leaves us, no matter how many times we fail or how far we stray. Our God will always be with us.

May these words remind you of the gospel message today: Jesus is Lord. Go and tell. He is with you!

Have you shared the good news of the gospel with someone lately? Why not make a list of two or three people that you would like to build a relationship that would allow you to engage them in spiritual conversations? Pray for them and watch how quickly those opportunities come your way.

#### DEVO 7: Hands ready to receive

To live a life with open hands means to live a life of surrender. It means trusting God with our future, our past, our finances, our families, with every fiber of our being, believing that his plan is for our good and for his greater glory. Yet living with open hands isn’t always about giving something up. Yes, we must open our hands as an act of trust and surrender, but the result will always be the receiving of blessings.

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he begins with an insight almost too grand for our minds to grasp: that God the Father has "blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1:3, 4). What an amazing idea to consider, that before a molecule of this earth was set in place, God chose us to be his children! Our Father and Creator both gives us life *and* everything we need for this life in the person of Jesus Christ! I know this way of thinking is countercultural. We live in a day when we can attain things faster than ever, retrieving facts from the internet in a matter of seconds and ordering things online with 24 hour shipping. I am certainly not complaining about these advances, yet somewhere in this craze of instant consumerism, we are tempted to believe the myth that we have the ability to meet our own needs. But Jesus tells us a different story. There is a deeper need that starts with the letting go of things, not because our things are necessarily bad, but because what we find in the person of Jesus is infinitely better! Only Jesus can give us a peace that surpasses all understanding, a joy that transcends any circumstances, and true freedom that could inspire someone like to Paul to write such hopeful words, even from a jail cell. Father, give me the faith to loosen my grip on the things of this world, that I might gain the greater spiritual blessings found only in your Son.

Take a mental stroll through your life and ask yourself if there are things you are holding onto with a vice-like grip. Those things that we grasp and hold so tightly, slowly but surely begin to get a grip on our heart. As God shows you these things, why don't you loosen your grip and give them to him. You may be amazed to find that he will give them right back to you.